

United States Congress

Washington, D.C. 20510

For Immediate Release
Thursday, May 25, 2006

Contact: Carol Guthrie (Baucus) 202.224.4515
Charla Neuman (Cantwell) 202.309.3447
Matthew Beck (Rangel) 202.225.3526
Lars Anderson (Smith) 202.225.6902

U.S. Senators Baucus and Cantwell and U.S. Reps. Rangel and Smith Call for Expanded TAA Benefits

Washington, D.C. - Today, Senate Finance Committee Ranking Member Max Baucus (D-MT) and Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) along with House Ways and Means Committee Ranking Member Charlie Rangel and U.S. Rep. Adam Smith sent a letter to the Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao applauding the Department's decision to "allow, for the first time, workers who produce 'intangible products,' like software, to benefit from TAA [Trade Adjustment Assistance]," that "represents an important and long-overdue change in the Department's policy."

"This good first step by the Labor Department should now be taken to its logical conclusion, which is the eligibility of all service sector workers for TAA," said Baucus. "If a software designer should be covered, so should an accountant or a hospital lab technician."

However, the letter notes that the decision to extend TAA eligibility to workers who produce software "was made only after several years of litigation and represents just a small step towards ensuring that the TAA program meets the needs of today's diverse workforce."

"This is fundamentally about fairness," said Cantwell. "In today's global market where so much of our economic growth is in the IT sector, we need to make sure that IT workers have access to the same retraining opportunities when they are displaced as other workers currently do. Every American worker deserves access to additional training and education so they can update their skills and continue to contribute to the growth of our economy."

The letter also notes that legislation has been introduced in the Senate by Baucus and sponsored by Cantwell (S. 1309) and introduced in the House by Smith and Rangel (H.R. 4156) to extend TAA benefits to all service sector workers adversely impacted by foreign competition, "including information technology (IT) workers, engineers, customer services and call center employees."

"Today's global economy demands flexibility and foresight," said Rangel. "This recent decision is certainly good news for some, but more progress is needed."

The letter also urges support for efforts to broaden the eligibility criteria for TAA to include all service workers.

"Extending TAA benefits to all service workers must be a priority," said Smith. "Hard-working Americans will be better able to compete in the global marketplace if we make a real investment in education and retraining opportunities."

--1 more--

The complete text of the letter is below:

May 25, 2006

The Honorable Elaine Chao
Secretary of Labor
200 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Secretary Chao:

We are writing to you in response to the recent decision by the Department of Labor to certify three groups of software workers for Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) benefits, as reported in the Federal Register on April 11, 2006. The Department's decision to allow, for the first time, workers who produce "intangible products," like software, to benefit from TAA represents an important and long-overdue change in the Department's policy.

The Department's decision to extend TAA eligibility to workers who produce software was made only after several years of litigation and represents just a small step towards ensuring that the TAA program meets the needs of today's diverse workforce. In light of the Department's decision to cover these workers, there can be no reason why the Department should not finally support extending TAA benefits to all workers specializing in intangible goods or services.

We have sponsored legislation (H.R. 4156 and S. 1309) to extend TAA benefits to all service sector workers adversely impacted by foreign competition, including information technology (IT) workers, engineers, customer services and call center employees. As globalization continues to spread and the demand for various services and intangible goods continues to change, we urge you to support our efforts to further broaden the eligibility criteria to include service workers.

We look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,

Senator Max Baucus
Ranking Member of Senate Finance Committee

Senator Maria Cantwell
Member of Congress - WA

Rep. Charles B. Rangel
Ranking Member of House Ways & Means Committee

Rep. Adam Smith
Member of Congress - WA